



1991

# Hope against Hope: Jewish and Christian Messianic Expectations in the Late Middle Ages

David B. Ruderman

University of Pennsylvania, RUDERMAN@SAS.UPENN.EDU

Follow this and additional works at: [https://repository.upenn.edu/history\\_papers](https://repository.upenn.edu/history_papers)

 Part of the [Cultural History Commons](#), [European History Commons](#), [History of Religion Commons](#), [Intellectual History Commons](#), and the [Jewish Studies Commons](#)

## Recommended Citation (OVERRIDE)

Ruderman, D.B. (1991). Hope against Hope: Jewish and Christian Messianic Expectations in the late Middle Ages. In Mirsky, A., Grossman, A., & Kaplan, Y. (Eds.), *Exile and Diaspora: Studies in the History of the Jewish People presented to Professor Haim Beinart*, 185-202. Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute.

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. [https://repository.upenn.edu/history\\_papers/67](https://repository.upenn.edu/history_papers/67)

For more information, please contact [repository@pobox.upenn.edu](mailto:repository@pobox.upenn.edu).

---

# Hope against Hope: Jewish and Christian Messianic Expectations in the Late Middle Ages

## Abstract

In the year 1473, Francesco de Meleto, a young Florentine with delusions of prophetic grandeur, journeyed to the city of Constantinople with a companion of his native city, Benedetto Manetti. There he sought from a number of Jewish legal scholars opinions regarding the time of the coming of the Messiah and the ultimate conversion of the Jews to Christianity.<sup>1</sup> He was especially pleased to gain the acquaintance of one notable Rabbi who secretly confessed to him, so he claimed, that all the Jews would convert to the Christian faith if "the Messiah for whom they had waited will not come during the entire year of our salvation, 1484."<sup>2</sup> The Jew based his prediction on the Book of Daniel, refusing to elaborate but claiming nevertheless that this view was not merely his own but also that "of all the other masters of their law."<sup>3</sup> Delighted that the Jews of his generation were ready to confirm his wildest fantasy regarding their imminent conversion, Meleto returned to Italy where he preached and composed treatises predicting the end of days and the ultimate conversion of the Jews and Moslems. In his *Convivio de'segreti della scriptura santa*, written some time after 1513, he records the Rabbi's remarks, adding his own clarifications with respect to the Daniel prophecies. Daniel must have indicated, so he claimed, that "in this time their great persecution begins, brought about by the kings of Spain and Portugal," representing no less than the universal flagellation of Christ's enemies which precedes the renovation of the Catholic Church.<sup>4</sup> Meleto had certified beyond doubt by Jewish counsel and by the evidence of Jewish suffering that the end of their "blasphemy" was at hand leading undeniably to the universal redemption of all mankind.

## Disciplines

Cultural History | European History | History | History of Religion | Intellectual History | Jewish Studies

DAVID B. RUDERMAN

HOPE AGAINST HOPE:  
JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN MESSIANIC  
EXPECTATIONS IN THE LATE MIDDLE AGES

In the year 1473, Francesco da Meleto, a young Florentine with delusions of prophetic grandeur, journeyed to the city of Constantinople with a companion of his native city, Benedetto Manetti. There he sought from a number of Jewish legal scholars opinions regarding the time of the coming of the Messiah and the ultimate conversion of the Jews to Christianity.<sup>1</sup> He was especially pleased to gain the acquaintance of one notable Rabbi who secretly confessed to him, so he claimed, that all the Jews would convert to the Christian faith if "the Messiah for whom they had waited will not come during the entire year of our salvation, 1484."<sup>2</sup> The Jew based his prediction on the Book of Daniel, refusing to elaborate but claiming nevertheless that this view was not merely his own but also that "of all the other masters of their law."<sup>3</sup> Delighted that the Jews of his generation were ready to

An earlier version of this essay was presented at a conference held at Columbia University on April 13-14, 1981, entitled "Perspectives on Jewish Messianism." I have revised and updated this work as a modest tribute to my teacher, Professor Haim Beinart, whose recent articles on *converso* messianism have greatly stimulated some of my own reflection here.

1 On Francesco da Meleto, see C. Vasoli, "La profezia di Francesco da Meleto," *Archivio di filosofia, Umanesimo e Ermeneutica* 3 (1963): 27-80; S. Bongi, "Francesco da Meleto un profeta fiorentino aitempi del Machiavello," *Archivio storico italiano*, series v, 3 (1889): 62-70; D. Weinstein, *Savonarola and Florence, Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance*, Princeton, 1970, pp. 353-57; and E. Garin, "Paolo Orlandini e il profeta Francesco da Meleto," in *La cultura filosofica del Rinascimento italiano*, Florence, 1961, pp. 213-23.

Another Christian prophet named Johannes Baptista Italus visited Constantinople at about the same time and, like Meleto, predicted that the Jews would convert in 1517. See G.H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia, 1961), pp. 18-19, 255; R. Schwoebel, *The Shadow of the Crescent: The Renaissance Image of the Turk (1453-1517)*, New York, 1969, p. 220. Williams suggests that Italus and Meleto may be the same person.

2 Vasoli, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-57.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 57. Only a few years earlier, letters written by *Conversos* in Constantinople regarding the birth of the Messiah and his imminent public appearance were received in Valencia, Spain. See Y. Baer, "The Messianic Movement in Spain in the Period of the Expulsion" (Hebrew), *Me'asef Zion* 5 (1933): 63-64; *idem.*, *History II*, pp. 292-5; *idem.*, *JcS II*, n. 392.

confirm his wildest fantasy regarding their imminent conversion, Meleto returned to Italy where he preached and composed treatises predicting the end of days and the ultimate conversion of the Jews and Moslems. In his *Convivio de' segreti della scriptura santa*, written some time after 1513, he records the Rabbi's remarks, adding his own clarifications with respect to the Daniel prophecies. Daniel must have indicated, so he claimed, that "in this time their great persecution begins, brought about by the kings of Spain and Portugal," representing no less than the universal flagellation of Christ's enemies which precedes the renovation of the Catholic Church.<sup>4</sup> Meleto had certified beyond doubt by Jewish counsel and by the evidence of Jewish suffering that the end of their "blasphemy" was at hand leading undeniably to the universal redemption of all mankind.

Some years earlier, some time between 1456 and 1467, an Italian Jew named Isaac Dieulosal composed a Hebrew work on the appearance of Halley's comet in Italy in 1456 in which he wrote:

So I saw, according to what was told to me, that many Christian scholars spoke and wrote about the message of this star. All their opinion and intention was for the purpose of making their people upright to restore them to good from their evil and despicable actions. And priests and preachers rose up each day, spreading out all over in order to inform and warn them (their Christian constituency). I zealously have sought the Lord, the God of Israel and his people and (thus) I say: "How is this act appropriate to God, blessed be He, that they (the Christians) will assume a task and a skill not bestowed on them while the children of our people whose strength lies (in the utterances) of the mouth and in prayer and repentance, will neglect their skill given to them from their fathers?... I declared that our holy Torah would not be inferior to their useless conversation... These people whose task is not such will repent while Israel whose faith it is, will not repent and will stand in tribulations?... For this act (the appearance of the comet) is a marvelously divine act to cause us to repent for it is a sign of the Messiah and the approach of the time of perfection and redemption..."<sup>5</sup>

For Isaac the Jew, the comet of 1456 had to be a sign of the approaching redemption of Israel, for how else might one explain the frenzied reactions of his Christian neighbors who were convinced beyond doubt of the authenticity of this portent of approaching doom. If Christian priests had admonished their faithful to repent, how could Jews fail to respond any differently?<sup>6</sup> Although embarrassed by the fact that

4 Vasoli, *op.cit.*, p. 57.

5 J. Hacker, "The Immigration of Spanish Jews to the Land of Israel and their Bond to It Between 1391 and 1492" (Hebrew), *Shalem* 1 (1973-74), pp. 143-44.

6 In addition to the references Hacker brings on the comet of 1456 (*ibid.*, p. 119, ns. 48 and 49), see L. Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 4, New York, 1934, pp. 413-14. Reports that Pope Calixtus III was so alarmed by two comets that appeared in Rome that year that he ordered the reading of special prayers and the ringing of bells seem to confirm Isaac's testimony. See also G. Celoria, "Sull'apparizione della cometa di Halley avvenuta nell'anno 1456," *Rendiconti del R. Istituto Lombardo*, 2nd series, 18 (1885): 112-25. For a later discussion of cometary theory in the writings of an

Christians could teach a lesson to Jews about the time of redemption, Isaac nevertheless had no misgivings about the appropriateness of Jews imitating this example. As Meleto, the Christian, had verified his own millennial expectations by appeal to Jewish authorities, so Isaac the Jew sought similar confirmation of his own messianic expectations by appeal to Christian authorities.

The reactions of Meleto and Dieulosal offer striking evidence of the interrelation of two apparently distinct cultural phenomena—Jewish and Christian messianic speculation and activity at the end of the Middle Ages.<sup>7</sup> Given the close social and cultural liaisons on so many other levels between Jewish and Christian societies in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, such shared messianic attitudes should hardly come as a surprise. Yet students of messianic activity in the Jewish communities of this period have usually viewed Jewish messianism as primarily an internal Jewish phenomenon. It is already a commonplace in Jewish historiography that the upsurge of messianic activity among Jews, beginning at the end of the fifteenth century and lasting well into the eighteenth century, was a direct response to the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492. More than any other event, the dramatic ejection of Spanish Jewry constituted the major catalyst in precipitating messianic stirrings among Jews and Marranos alike. Spanish exiles who settled in Italy, Turkey and Palestine became the primary agents of messianic passion; in Safed they also were responsible for the creative fusion of Kabbalah and messianism, which marked the most lasting innovation of sixteenth century Jewish thought.<sup>8</sup>

Italian Jew, see D. Ruderman, "The Receptivity of Jewish Thought to the New Astronomy of the Seventeenth Century: The Case of Abraham ben Hananiyah Yagel," *Jews in Italy: Studies Dedicated to the Memory of U. Cassuto on the 100th Anniversary of His Birth*, Jerusalem 1988.

- 7 Most studies of Christian messianism generally make distinctions between messianism, millenarianism and apocalypticism. See for example, Y. Talmon, "Millenarianism," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* 10 (1968): 349; N. Cohn, "Medieval Millenarism: Its Bearing on the Comparative Study of Millenarian Movements," in S.L. Thrupp, ed., *Millennial Dreams in Action, Comparative Studies in Society and History*, supplement 2 (The Hague, 1962), p. 31; B. McGinn, *Visions of the End, Apocalyptic Traditions in the Middle Ages*, New York, 1979, pp. 26-36, who prefers the term "apocalypticism." Studies of Jewish messianism usually employ the term "messianism." For the purposes of this paper, I have utilized the "loose" definition of messianism by R.J.Z. Werblowsky ("Messiah and Messianic Movements" in *Encyclopaedia Britannica, Macropaedia*, vol. 11 (Chicago, 1979), p. 1017: "...beliefs or theories regarding an eschatological (concerning the last times) improvement of the state of man or the world, and a final consummation of history," while using the other two terms more or less interchangeably. I have also avoided the term "messianic movement" in referring to the phenomena described below. On the distinction between messianic "ideology" and "movement," see Werblowsky, p. 1017, and see S. Sharot, "Jewish Millenarianism: A Comparison of Medieval Communities," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22 (1980): 395, n. 5. Sharot's essay subsequently has appeared in somewhat expanded form as Chapter 5 of his *Messianism, Mysticism, and Magic: A Sociological Analysis of Jewish Religious Movements*, Chapel Hill, 1982.
- 8 See especially, Baer, "The Messianic Movement," G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York, 1941, pp. 241-7; *idem.*, *Sabbatai Zevi, The Mystical Messiah*, Princeton, 1973, pp. 18ff.; H.H. Ben Sasson, "Exile and Redemption Through the Eyes of the Spanish Exiles," (Hebrew), in Yishak F. Baer *Jubilee Volume*, ed. S.W. Baron, B. Dinur et al., Jerusalem, 1960, pp. 216-27; A.Z. Aescoly, *Ha-Tenu'ot Ha-Meshihiot be-Yisrael*, Jerusalem, 1956, pp. 231ff.; A.H. Silver, *A History of Messianic Speculation in Israel*, Boston, 1959, pp. 110ff. See most recently, I. Tishby, "Genizah Fragments of a Messianic-Mystical Text on the Expulsion from Spain and Portugal," (Hebrew), *Zion* 47 (1983): 55-102; 347-85; and his book, *Meshihut Be-Dor Gerushe Sefarad Ve-Portugal* (Jerusalem, 1985); R. Shatz, "An Outline

This understanding of Jewish messianism, so persuasively argued by Yizhak Baer and Gershom Scholem, among others, is certainly not incorrect but perhaps requires refinement and modification. One need not deny the significance of 1492 while, at the same time, enlarging the context for understanding Jewish messianism in this period. The questions that I would like to pose are these: To what extent is Jewish messianism in the late Middle Ages a manifestation of forces acutely present in the larger society shared by Jews and Christians alike? Can one discern in this period Christian influence on Jewish messianic activity as well as Jewish influence on Christian millennial stirrings? In what ways might Jewish messianism in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries be considered an expression of conformity and assimilation to Christian culture, and in what ways might it also constitute a primary assertion of Jewish uniqueness and estrangement from Christian society?

Few historians, to my knowledge, have examined Jewish messianic expectations primarily in the context of similar expectations in the Christian world during the medieval or early modern period.<sup>9</sup> I would like here to begin such an examination, with the hope of answering at least partially the questions I have posed, restricting myself primarily to the period of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Yet any impressions I may draw for this decisive period would likely be suggestive for earlier and later periods as well.

### *Christian Influences on Jewish Messianism*

Let me begin by delineating the potential influence of ideas, events, and personalities in the Christian world of this era on the shaping of Jewish messianic consciousness. Excluding, for the moment, the undeniable impact of the Spanish expulsion, what other "contact situations"<sup>10</sup> between Jews and Christians might have aroused expectation of the imminent coming of the Messiah within the Jewish community?

Isaac's reaction to the comet of 1456 as a clear portent of the Messiah's arrival is hardly an isolated occurrence; rather it fits into an entire pattern of intercultural receptivity to astrological events commonly shared by Christians and Jews throughout this period. The significance of astrological beliefs as a critical factor in Renaissance culture in general and for Christian millennial expectations in particular has been noted sufficiently by historians of late medieval-Renaissance culture. One need only examine the outpouring of astrological prognostications regarding comets and planetary conjunctions and their impact on European society at the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth century to appreciate the potency of such

of the Image of the Political-Messianic Arousal after the Spanish Expulsion (Hebrew)," *Da'at* II (1982-83): 53-66; R. Elior, "Messianic Expectations and Spiritualization of Religious Life in The Sixteenth Century," *REJ*, 145 (1986): 35-49.

9 See Sharot's article (n. 7 above) which offers some comparison of a general nature. Sharot's conclusions seem to confirm my own on the inadequacy of general sociological models for explaining such complex phenomena as Jewish messianism. Cf. McGinn, *Visions of the End*, pp. 29ff. For other partial attempts to compare Jewish and Christian messianism, see Scholem, *Sabbatai Zevi*, pp. 93ff. and Y.H. Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, New York, 1971, pp. 307ff.

10 On the use of the term, see D.J. Geanakoplos, *Interaction of the "Sibling" Byzantine and Western Culture in the Middle Ages*, New Haven and London, 1976, pp. 3-4.

speculations in heightening visions of the Apocalypse, the Apostolic Pope and the imminent golden age. At the end of the fifteenth century such prognosticators as Paul of Middleberg, Antonio Torquato, and George Lichtenberg among many others, profoundly aroused contradictory anticipations of approaching doom and regeneration throughout Europe.<sup>11</sup> And their predictions were no less fascinating for astrological enthusiasts within the Jewish community. Every major astrological event in the second half of the fifteenth century and the first half of the sixteenth century attracted simultaneously and with remarkable regularity the attention of both Jews and Christians. A good example of such astrological ecumenicity is that of Meleto's testimony of the Turkish Rabbi's prediction for 1484. It seems more than a coincidence that this Jew pointed especially to the completion of "an astrological great year," a year heralded by a large group of Christian astrologers as one of spectacular changes for Christians. 1484 was also the year of Savonarola's prophetic awakening, the year of religious renovation according to Giovanni Nanni of Viterbo as well as the year of the public appearance of the strange hermetic prophet Giovanni Mercurio da Correggio in Italy.<sup>12</sup> Nor was the Constantinople Rabbi the only member of his community to appraise the eschatological significance of that year. As far away as Ferrara, Abraham b. Mordecai Farissol recorded his impressions of the Christian prophet Correggio while revealing an intimate awareness of the relation of astrological great years such as 1484 to the birth of prophecy.<sup>13</sup>

But 1484 is only one instance of similarly shared perceptions among Jews and Christians regarding years of astrological significance beginning in our period in 1456 and including such dates as 1467-8, 1484, 1500, 1503-4, 1517, and 1530-1, to mention only the most prominent. Any student of Jewish messianism is aware that each of these dates played important roles in the cosmic plans of such distinguished Jewish prognosticators as Abraham Zakut, Bonet de Lattes, Abraham Eliezer Ha-Levi, Isaac Abravanel and many others. But less emphasis has been placed on the fact that each of these dates coincides precisely with the calculations of Christian

11 See for example, C. Vasoli, "Temi mistici e profetici alla fine del Quattrocento," in *Studi sulla cultura del Rinascimento*, Manduria, 1968, pp. 180-240; D. Cantimori, *Eretici italiani del Cinquecento, ricerche storiche*, Florence, 1939; reprinted, 1967, pp. 12ff.; E. Garin, *Lo zodiaco della vita, la polemica sull'astrologia dal Trecento al Cinquecento*, Rome and Bari, 1976, especially Chapter I; idem., "L'attesa dell'età nuova e la 'Renovatio'" in *L'età nuova, ricerche di storia della cultura dal XII al XVI secolo*, Naples, 1969, pp. 81-111; Weinstein, *Savonarola*, especially, pp. 88ff.; A. Chastel, "L'Antéchrist à la Renaissance," *Cristianesimo e ragion di Stato, L'umanesimo e il demoniaco nell'arte*, Atti del II Congresso Internazionale di Studi Umanistici, ed. by E. Castelli, Rome, 1953, pp. 177-86; M. Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages, A Study in Joachimism* Oxford, 1969; Thorndike, *History*, 4, pp. 467-84; G. Tognetti, "Note sul profetismo nel R'nascimento et la letteratura relativa," *Bullettino dell'Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo* 82 (1970): 129-57.

12 On 1484, see Weinstein, *Savonarola*, pp. 88ff.; on Nanni, see Garin, *La cultura filosofica*, pp. 188ff. and R. Weiss, "Traccia per una biografia di Annio da Viterbo," *Italia medioevale e umanistica* 5 (1962): 425-41; on Correggio, see D. Ruderman, "Giovanni Mercurio da Correggio's Appearance in Italy as Seen Through the Eyes of an Italian Jew," *Renaissance Quarterly* 28 (1975): 309-22. For an alternative explanation of the importance of 1484 in messianic prognostications, see Tishby, "Genizah Fragments," p. 381ff.

13 Ruderman, "Giovanni Mercurio da Correggio's Appearance," and idem., *The World of a Renaissance Jew, The Life and Thought of Abraham ben Mordecai Farissol*, Cincinnati, 1981, chapter 10.

speculators. One more example should suffice. Moshe Idel has recently pointed out how Yohanan Alemanno copied a prognostication of an anonymous Italian astrologer who predicted that after considerable Jewish suffering, a prophet would appear during the great conjunction of October, 1503.<sup>14</sup> For Alemanno, the rise of such a prophet suggested unmistakably the coming of the Jewish Messiah. The fact that a Jewish savant copied verbatim a Christian expert to confirm his own eschatology is remarkable in itself. What is even more revealing, however, is the incredible concurrence regarding the prominence of this date (or one approximating it) among Jews and Christians alike. A list of such names would comprise a virtual "who's who" of messianic prognosticators in the early sixteenth century: Jews, Isaac Abravanel, Abraham Zakut, Joseph Ibn Shraga, Bonet de Lattes, Abraham Farissol, Asher Lemlein, the author of *Sefer ha-Meshiv*, and Christians, Antonio Torquato, Girolamo Torrella, Albert of Trent, Sandro Botticelli, Antonio da Rieti, Sabastian Brant, and more.<sup>15</sup> Such an overwhelming accord regarding the eschatological import of one year suggests beyond doubt the insufficiency of explaining Jewish messianic expectations for 1503-4 solely on the basis of their temporal proximity to 1492.

Besides astrological portents, major historical events that significantly transformed the face of European civilization in this period directly affected the messianic sensibilities of Jews and Christians alike. Living under the same skies as their Christian contemporaries, Jews evidently could not ignore the eschatological messages, so apparent to Christians, of the conquest of Constantinople in 1453, the French Charles VIII's invasion of Italy in 1494, the dramatic appearance of Luther in 1517, the sack of Rome by the German Charles V in 1527, and the sensational discoveries of the New World. With no exception, each of these events figures prominently in the messianic thinking of contemporary Jews who appear to be impressed by them either because of the momentous transformations such happenings were generating within Christian society as a whole or because of the hysterical millennial excitement they were evoking among Christians. Jews totally concurred with the assessment of many Christians that the fall of Constantinople and the sack of Rome were blatant signs of the imminent destruction of the Christian

14 M. Beit Arié and M. Idel, "A Treatise on (the Calculation of) the End and Astrology by R. Abraham Zakut" (Hebrew), *Kiryat Sefer* 54 (1979): 180-2 and M. Idel, "On R. Yohanan Alemanno and 'Ma'amar Hozeh'" (Hebrew), *Kiryat Sefer* 54 (1979): 875-6.

15 Idel has already noted the significance of this date for some of these individuals (see "A Treatise on the End," p. 282, n. 44, 45; and "On R. Yohanan Alemanno," p. 826, n. 19 for further bibliography; and compare also Tishby, p. 365). For Abravanel, see B. Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel, Statesman and Philosopher*, Philadelphia, 1953, p. 218; for Lemlein, see Aescoly, *op. cit.* pp. 307ff.; for Torquato, see Thorndike, *op. cit.* 4, pp. 468-70; 5, p. 179 and Garin, *op. cit.* "L'attesa dell'età nuova," pp. 105ff.; for Albert of Trent, see D. Weinstein, "The Apocalypse in Sixteenth Century Florence, The Vision of Albert of Trent," in *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Hans Baron*, ed. A. Molho and J.A. Tedeschi, Dekalb, Illinois, 1971, pp. 311-31; for Botticelli, see Weinstein, *Savonarola*, pp. 335; for Rieti, see Weinstein, "Albert of Trent," pp. 314ff.; for Brant, see G. Strauss, ed. and trans., *Manifestations of Discontent in Germany on the Eve of the Reformation*, Bloomington and London, 1971, p. 224. Undoubtedly, a more comprehensive search would reveal more such references.



Empire.<sup>16</sup> The messianic significance of the discoveries of the New World profoundly shaped the thinking of Christians like Columbus and the Franciscan Gerónimo de Medieta, and of Jews like Abraham Farissol, Abraham Yagel, Samuel Usque, and Yohanan Alemanno.<sup>17</sup>

Even the messianic significance of Luther's challenge to the hegemony of the Catholic Church did not go unnoticed by at least one contemporary Jewish observer. For Abraham Eliezer Ha-Levi, writing from Jerusalem, Luther appeared as a kind of secret Jew, rebelling not only against Papal authority but against the essence of Christianity itself. Luther clearly signified the beginning of a process whereby Christians would begin to draw closely to Judaism in the advent of the messianic Age.<sup>18</sup> More than that of any other Jewish thinker, Ha-Levi's view of contemporary historical events as messianic theophanies in an elaborate cosmic plan reveals the extent to which cataclysmic changes in European civilization as a whole—beyond the single event of 1492—deeply stirred the apocalyptic tendencies of some contemporary Jews.

A further illustration of how historical events in Christian society affected Jewish messianic thinking is the case of Charles VIII's dramatic invasion of Italy in 1494. The Christian messianic prophecies associated with his campaign, emanating out of France and Italy, especially that of Savonarola, have long been known.<sup>19</sup> That certain Jews also attributed eschatological importance to the French king's campaign is less known and certainly less understandable. Yet it appears that Charles' appearance in Italy did arouse messianic interest among contemporary Jews who saw him as an element in the unfolding messianic drama if not the true Messiah himself. A Jewish scribe added to a manuscript of *Sefer Peliah* a comment that the invasion of Charles VIII was indeed a clear manifestation of apocalyptic agitation, the messianic birth pangs preceding the Messiah, who would definitely appear in 1503.<sup>20</sup> In his *Opus Davidicum*, written in Italy in 1497, the Franciscan priest

16 See for example, for 1453, Baer, "The Messianic Movement," p. 61; G. Scholem, "The Maggid of R. Yosef Taitazak and the Visions Ascribed to Him," (Hebrew) *Sefunot* 11 (1971-8): 79; H. Beinart, *Anusim be-Din Ha-Inquisizia*, Tel Aviv, 1965, pp. 19, 54-55; Hacker, *op. cit.* p. 116ff. Tishby, *op. cit.*, p. 354ff. and p. 364ff. where the author also emphasizes the messianic importance of the Turkish victory at Lepanto. For 1527, see for example, M. Beit-Arié, "An Epistle on the Matter of the Ten Tribes by R. Abraham b. Eliezer Ha-Levi," (Hebrew) *Kovez al Yad* 6 (16) (1962): 372-73; H.H. Ben Sasson, "The Reformation in Contemporary Jewish Eyes," (Hebrew), *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 4 (1970): pp. 75-6, 86.

17 On Christian interest, see for example, J.L. Phelan, *The Millennial Kingdom of the Franciscans in the New World, A Study of the Writings of Gerónimo de Mendieta (1525-1604)*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1956; M. Bataillon, "Évangélisme et millénarisme au Nouveau Monde" in *Courants religieux et humanisme à la fin du xv<sup>e</sup> au début du xvi<sup>e</sup> siècle*; on Usque's interest, see M. Cohen, ed. *Samuel Usque's Consolations for the Tribulations of Israel*, Philadelphia, 1965, pp. 220ff.; on Yagel's interest, see the selection from *Sefer Be'er Sheva* (mistitled *Beit Ya'ar ha-Levanon*) published in *Kovez Al Yad* IV (1888): 37ff. On Farissol's interest and additional references on the entire subject, see Ruderman, *The World of a Renaissance Jew*, chapter 11.

18 G. Scholem, "New Researches on R. Abraham b. Eliezer Ha-Levi," (Hebrew), *Kiryat Sefer* 7 (1930): 161ff., 444ff.; Ben-Sasson, "Reformation," pp. 76ff.

19 See Weinstein, *Savonarola*, pp. 166ff.; Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy*, pp. 320ff.

20 S. Krauss, "Le Roi de France Charles VIII et les espérances messianiques," *REJ* 51 (1906), pp. 87-96.

Johannes Angelus Terzois de Legonissa also points to Jewish messianic reactions related to Charles' expedition. Writing to demonstrate the Davidic origin of the French king, Johannes also refers to the Jewish persecutions in his age, a penitential fervor among Jews and even the beginning of their immigration to Israel.<sup>21</sup> That Joseph Ha-Cohen, in his history of kings of France and Turkey, also assigned to Charles VIII an eschatological role in his own construction of world history has been recently argued by Yosef Hayyim Yerushalmi.<sup>22</sup> All three pieces of evidence suggest that Jewish messianic anticipation could be induced not only by events directly affecting Jews but also by circumstances that had little or no obvious relation to Jews. Since Jews nevertheless were attentive to the messianic overtones of Charles' actions, they seem clearly to be influenced in this case by the apocalyptic designs of their Christian contemporaries.

Another example of the impact of Christian activity on Jewish eschatological thinking also needs to be recalled. By the early sixteenth century, Jews, especially those in Italy, could not help noticing that a sizable number of Christians were studying Hebrew and especially the Kabbalah. "And since," wrote Abraham Azulai, "the messianic king will appear through the merits [of this study] and through none other, it behooves us not to be remiss."<sup>23</sup> Moreover, others of Azulai's generation surely saw the unraveling of the secrets of Jewish mysticism to non-Jews as a precondition for hastening the advent of redemption. Both Abraham Ha-Levi and Isaac de Lattes articulated identical views, and the same idea was held by a number of Christian Kabbalists as well.<sup>24</sup> I shall return to the important function of the Kabbalah as a vehicle for the illumination of divine mysteries among Christians and thus an incontrovertible sign of the Messiah's coming.

To recapitulate, it would appear that Jewish messianic stirrings in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were directly influenced by a concatenation of astrological and historical events in the Christian world (other than 1492) which precipitated similar messianic reactions among Christians. These events, interpreted by Christians as irrefutable portents of the approaching Apocalypse, together with a Christian awakening of interest in Judaism and arcane Hebrew texts, served to confirm and reinforce expectations among Jews that the Messiah was indeed approaching.

### *Jewish influences on Christian Messianism*

Let me now turn to the reverse side of the interaction: the potential influence of Jews, Judaism and specifically Jewish messianic behavior on Christian millennial stirrings of this period.<sup>25</sup> The cosmic role of the Jews in the eschatological blueprint of ancient

21 A. Limber, "L'Expédition Italienne de Charles VIII et les espérances messianiques des Juifs, Temoignage du manuscrit B.N. Lat. 5971A," *REJ* 137 (1978), pp. 179-186.

22 Y. Yerushalmi, "Messianic Impulses in Joseph Ha-Kohen," in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. B.D. Cooperman, Cambridge, Mass., 1983, pp. 460-87.

23 Quoted by Scholem, *Sabbatai Zevi*, p. 22.

24 See Scholem, "Abraham Eliezer Ha-Levi" (Hebrew), *Kiryat Sefer* 7 (1930): 445; Introduction to Isaac Lattes' edition to the *Sefer ha-Zohar* quoted in K. Stow, *Catholic Thought and Papal Jewry Policy 1555-1593*, New York, 1977, p. 251. On this idea among Christian kabbalists, see below.

25 For Sabbatian influences on Seventeenth century Christian millennialism, see Scholem, *Sabbatai Zevi*, pp. 101ff.

and medieval Christendom was still an essential feature of fifteenth and sixteenth century Christian millennialism. The primary function that Jews were to play in the Last Judgment was that they would convert. Thus St. Augustine wrote:

And in connection with that judgment the following events will come to pass, as we have learned: Elias the Tishbite shall come; the Jew shall believe; Anti-Christ shall persecute; Christ shall judge; the dead shall rise; the good and the wicked shall be separated; the world shall be burned and renewed.<sup>26</sup>

Kenneth Stow, in his book on sixteenth century Papal Jewry policy, has sufficiently demonstrated the critical link between Christian eschatological hopes and preoccupations with Jewish conversion throughout the sixteenth century.<sup>27</sup> I need only mention here that this link is highly prominent in almost every Christian apocalyptic scenario of the period. The theme of imminent conversion of the Jews is obsessively displayed on almost every page of Francesco da Meleto's *Convivio*, already referred to above.<sup>28</sup> But Meleto is only one example of many Florentine visionaries, Franciscan missionaries, political Joachmites or Christian Kabbalists who not only reproduce the stock scenarios of the Anti-Christ, last emperor, angelic pastor, and conversion of the Jews, and the Final World Sabbath, but also place unmistakable emphasis on the Jewish component of this spectacle.<sup>29</sup> This tendency is especially accentuated in Spanish formulations of the Conquest of the New World as the fulfillment of prophecies of the Apocalypse. Thus Gerónimo de Mendieta could announce that in the holy task of the Spanish nation of leading all non-believers to the promised land of the Church, the Jews would be the first and easiest group to approach the baptismal font.<sup>30</sup>

Reinforcing Christian expectations of the imminence of Jewish conversion was the awareness of the punishment and persecution meted out to contemporary Jews, especially those of the Spanish kingdom. The nexus between Jewish (and Marrano) suffering and the ultimate conversion to Christianity is obvious to Mendieta: "I am firmly convinced," he writes, "that as those Catholic monarchs (Ferdinand and Isabella) were granted the mission of beginning to extirpate those three diabolical squadrons, 'perfidious' Judaism, 'false' Mohammedanism, and 'blind' idolatry along with the fourth squadron of the heretics whose remedy and medicine is the Holy Inquisition, in like manner... completing the task has been reserved for their royal successors: final conversion of all the peoples of the earth to the bosom of the Church."<sup>31</sup> Catholics and Protestants alike took notice of the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain and placed it squarely in their own assorted visions of the Apocalypse and the destruction of the Anti-Christ.<sup>32</sup>

26 St. Augustine, *The City of God* trans., M. Dods, bk. 20, c. 30, p. 762.

27 Stow, *Catholic Thought and Papal Jewry Policy*, chapter 11.

28 See note 1 above.

29 For a comprehensive survey, see Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy*.

30 See Phelan, *op.cit.* p. 16.

31 Quoted by Phelan, p. 13.

32 Some examples include Francesco da Meleto (in Vasoli, "La profezia," p. 57); Girolamo Torrella (Thorndike 4, p. 584); Johannes Angelus (Limber, p. 183); and Guillaume Postel (W.J. Bousma,

But some fifteenth and sixteenth century Christians were also cognizant, to a surprising degree, of every major manifestation of Jewish messianic activity in their era. The extent to which contemporary Jewish messianic ferment infected them is difficult to gauge. But there is no doubt that they took notice and that what they saw in the Jewish community served to reinforce their own messianic proclivities. Clearly a best-seller among Jewish and Christian prognosticators of this period was Abraham bar Hiyyah's *Megillat ha-Megaleh*. The Latin translation of his astrological calculations on the Messiah, particularly the section on great conjunctions, was readily available to Christians who seemed genuinely impressed by his predictions. Abraham bar Hiyyah, alias Sasardora, is mentioned by Alonso de Espina, Pierre d'Ailly, Pico della Mirandola, Paolo Orlandini, Savonarola, and he probably influenced Francesco da Meleto, among many others.<sup>33</sup> The frequency with which contemporary Jews utilize these same computations is equally impressive.<sup>34</sup>

But Christians were informed of Jewish messianic speculation by means other than Jewish books. Meleto's journey to Constantinople to familiarize himself with the "oral" teachings of the Jews on the Messiah is a clear indication of the importance of such teachings to at least some Christians in confirming their own eschatological schemes. In his lionization of Charles VIII's messianic role, Johannes Angelus not only glorified the French king's Davidic ancestry but also seemed genuinely impressed that some contemporary Jews themselves took Charles to be a clear sign of the approaching messianic age. Despite Johannes' obvious distaste for Jews of his era, he nevertheless felt that their own advocacy of the French king lent credence to his propaganda campaign on behalf of Charles.<sup>35</sup>

Numerous other examples of Christian awareness of Jewish messianism are easily forthcoming. The Florentine chronicler of Savonarola's mission, Piero Parenti, is not oblivious to Jewish and Moslem messianic prophecies of imminent realization in his own day.<sup>36</sup> Cardinal Bathazar del Rio, in his inaugural speech before the Fifth Lateran Council, mentions the diffusion of prophets in his own day among "gli infedeli, ebrei e musulmani."<sup>37</sup> The widespread interest in the messianic calculations of Jewish astrologers such as Abraham Zakut and Bonet de Lattes is well known.<sup>38</sup> A marvelous indication of both the diffusion and longevity of Jewish messianic

*Concordia Mundi, The Career and Thought of Guillaume Postel [1510-1581]*, Cambridge, Mass., 1957, p. 206). Other Christian references to the Spanish expulsion are mentioned in J. Hacker, "Some Letters on the Expulsion of the Jews from Spain and Sicily (Hebrew)," *Studies in the History of Jewish Society... Presented to Professor Jacob Katz*, Jerusalem, 1980, p. 64, note 2, especially the references to the works of Shmueli and Baron. One should also add to the above list Jean Bodin's *Heptaplomeres* and Johann Reuchlin's *De Arte Cabalistica*.

33 See Garin, "L'attesa," pp. 92ff. and J. Guttman, Introduction to *Sefer Megillat Ha-Megaleh*, ed. A. Poznansky, Berlin, 1924; reprinted Jerusalem, 1968, p. xxviii ff.

34 See Guttman, pp. xxi ff. and Beit-Arié and Idel, "A Treatise on the End," p. 181, n. 37.

35 See note 21 above.

36 Vasoli, "Temi mistici," p. 224.

37 *Ibid.*

38 See especially, C. Roth, "The Last Years of Abraham Zakut," *Sefarad* 9 (1947): 445-54; D. Goldschmidt, "Bonetto Latis e i suoi scritti latini e italiani," in *Scritti in memoria di Enzo Sereni*, Jerusalem, 1970, pp. 88-94.

prophecies within the Christian world is the evidence supplied by Gershom Scholem concerning a *menorah* held by the Rabbis of Constantinople. According to information available to a Canon in Pressberg, writing in 1750, the Rabbis of Constantinople had received a *menorah* (with the date 1532 inscribed on it) in the fifteenth century from R. Levi ben Ḥabib of Jerusalem, considered to be a clear manifestation of the approaching redemption.<sup>39</sup>

That sixteenth century Christians took note and were even fascinated by Jewish messianic figures, years before Shabbatai Zevi's dramatic appearance, is well known and need only be mentioned briefly here. David Ganz reports that many Christians were impressed by Asher Lemlein.<sup>40</sup> The German humanist Sebastian Münster even describes Lemlein in a brief passage.<sup>41</sup> David Reuveni's appearance in Italy intrigues many Christians not the least of whom include the Pope himself and Cardinal Giles of Viterbo.<sup>42</sup> No less notable a scholar than Giambattista Ramusio is charged with interviewing Reuveni in Venice.<sup>43</sup> Shlomo Molcho writes about his Christian following who come faithfully to listen to his sermons.<sup>44</sup> He is protected by the Pope despite his suspect heretical leanings.<sup>45</sup> J.A. Widmanstat, another distinguished German scholar, notices the Jewish flag carried by Molcho.<sup>46</sup> And a week before he drafts the Augsburg Confession, in 1530, the most authoritative statement of Lutheran faith, Philip Melanchthon appears to have reacted directly to Molcho in explicitly condemning Jewish chiliasm.<sup>47</sup>

It is impossible to assess the significance of all such references to Jewish messianism among Christians. What is clear is that a Christian community nurturing its own apocalyptic fantasies found more than casual interest in both contemporary Jewish messianic speculation and the more dramatic spectacle of Jewish messianic pretenders in their day.<sup>48</sup> Christian messianic expectations in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries undoubtedly would have flourished with or without corresponding ideas and patterns of behavior within the Jewish community, just as Jewish messianism in the same period would have captivated the minds and hearts of contemporary Jews whether or not Jews were aware of analogous Christian stirrings. Nevertheless there is sufficient evidence to suggest that some cross-fertilization of messianic ideas did transpire and that Jewish and Christian messianic fears and hopes did intersect on numerous levels, at least serving to reinforce and reconfirm already implanted and fully matured visions of the approaching end.

39 Scholem, "R. Abraham Eliezer Ha-Levi" (Hebrew), *Kiryat Sefer* 7 (1930): 163ff., 441.

40 Aescoly, *Ha-Tenu'ot*, p. 308.

41 *Ibid.*, pp. 309-10.

42 A.Z. Aescoly, ed., *Sippur David Ha-Reuveni*, Jerusalem, 1940, pp. 44-57, 171-78; *idem.*, *Ha-Tenu'ot*, pp. 354-59.

43 Aescoly, *Sippur*, p. 183-89; Aescoly, *Ha-Tenu'ot*, pp. 381-84.

44 Aescoly, *Ha-Tenu'ot*, p. 386.

45 *Ibid.*, pp. 379-80.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 411.

47 Scholem, *Sabbatai Zevi*, p. 100; J.H. Leith, *Creeds of the Churches*, Garden City, N. Y., 1963, p. 73.

48 One might note here the preponderance of "heretical" Catholics or at least those outside "mainstream" Christianity who were especially attracted to manifestations of Jewish messianism. This interesting phenomenon merits further investigation.

### *Christian Kabbalists and the Marranos*

Any discussion of such mutual influences remains incomplete without reference to two critical elements in the history of late medieval messianism among Jews and Christians: the Christian Kabbalah as a potential receptacle of Jewish messianic ideas into the Christian community, on the one hand, and the Marranos as a potential channel for Christian messianic ideas into the Jewish community, on the other.

Not every Christian attracted to the study of Jewish mystical sources in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was also an apocalyptic visionary; Pico is the most obvious illustration.<sup>49</sup> Nevertheless, it is more than a coincidence that a prominent number of Christian kabbalists fervently believed in the imminent coming of the Apocalypse and were preoccupied with various eschatological schema of the approaching end. In fact, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that for some of them the study of Hebrew and kabbalistic sources contributed most heavily to their sensation of tense expectation in the immediate consummation of the world. In particular, Pietro Galatino,<sup>50</sup> Giles of Viterbo<sup>51</sup> and Guillaume Postel<sup>52</sup> exhibit most conspicuously the confluence of kabbalistic ideas and messianic agitation among Christians. All three were conscious of living in the last age because of the newly discovered Hebrew mysteries that were now placed at their disposal. Each of them gave particular emphasis to the study of Hebrew as a unifying principle of the approaching golden age; each of them weighed heavily the conversion of the Jews as a significant dimension of their eschatological schemes; and each, like many contemporary Jews, saw their study of kabbalah as a primary instrument of spiritual illumination galvanizing the divine energies of the universe, propelling all mankind towards the approaching religious climax. Through their study of the kabbalah, all the mysteries of divine creation would be deciphered, signaling the approaching redemption. All three probably knew each other and nurtured close relationships with contemporary Jewish savants.<sup>53</sup> More than any other Christian group, they demonstrate dramatically the profound impression Jewish eschatology left on contemporary Christian culture.

Only the general outlines of the specific Jewish content of their messianic visions have yet been delineated, but already it is apparent that one critical source shaping

49 Yet a number of intellectuals in Pico's circle were attracted to apocalypticism. See C. Vasoli, "Giovanni Nesi tra Donato Acciaivoli e Girolamo Savonarola. Testi editi e inediti," in *Umanesimo e teologia tra '400 e '500*, ed. A.F. Verde et al., Pistoia, 1973, pp. 103-79; Weinstein, *Savonarola*, chap. 6; Garin, *La cultura filosofica*, pp. 180ff.

50 P.A. Kleinhaus, "De Vita et Operibus Petri Galatini O.F.M. scientiarum biblicarum cultoris (c. 1460-1540)," *Antonianum* I (1926), pp. 147-79; 327-56; Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy*, pp. 234-38, 358, 366-67; 442-47.

51 J.W. O'Malley, *Giles of Viterbo: On Church and Reform, A Study in Renaissance Thought*, Leiden, 1968, Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy*, pp. 235, 267-8, 270-1, 364-66, 441-2.

52 W.J. Bousma, *Concordia Mundi: The Career and Thought of Guillaume Postel (1510-1581)*, Cambridge, Mass., 1957; F. Secret, "Guillaume Postel et les Courants prophétiques de la Renaissance," *Studi Francesci* I (1957): 375-95; Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy*, pp. 287-9, 381-4, 479-81; M. Kuntz, *Guillaume Postel, Prophet of the Restitution of All Things: His Life and Thought*, The Hague, 1981.

53 Secret, "Guillaume Postel," pp. 371-81.

their views were the writings of the thirteenth century kabbalist Abraham Abulafia. What must have been appealing to them was his view of messianism as a spiritual process whereby the Messiah as a perfect mystic would illuminate the true interpretation of the law, thus bringing about a new religious teaching of ecumenical harmony.<sup>54</sup> Abulafia's writings were widely known among sixteenth century Jews—men like Asher Lemlein, Shlomo Molcho and a number of kabbalists in the circle of Isaac Luria<sup>55</sup>—and profoundly affected their own messianic stirrings. Undoubtedly, one of the key components engendering a common universe of messianic discourse among certain sixteenth century Jews and Christians was the noticeable impact Abulafian ideas left on each community.

Marranos returning to Judaism, on the other hand, seem to offer the most likely conduit for the passage of Christian millenary ideas into the Jewish community.<sup>56</sup> Gershom Scholem has sensibly cautioned us, however, not to exaggerate the potential Christian influences of such individuals on Jewish messianism. Certain developments are imminent in the nature of all religious phenomena; a common religious motif need not be labelled Christian or Jewish when one compares analogous developments in two contiguous systems of religious speculation.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, Scholem readily admits that certain Marranos in the seventeenth century unquestionably infected Sabbatian ideology with Christian notions of the Messiah, particularly those found among heretical rather than orthodox traditions of Christianity.<sup>58</sup> Although not a Marrano himself, Nathan of Gaza may reflect some of this influence in the blatantly Christian character of his religious terminology.<sup>59</sup> The sermons of the former Marrano Moses Abudiente (d. 1688) betray Christian typological exegesis on the Messiah.<sup>60</sup> And most astonishing in this regard is the conscious acknowledgment on the part of Abraham Cardozo that his view of the Jewish Messiah is shaped unmistakably by his Christian upbringing. Thus he informs his brother on the accuracy of his messianic belief by arguing:

And if the Christians say the same, what harm can come to us from the truth? They took it from the sages of Israel. To what extent is it entangled in Augustine's Book on the City of God, being a contemporary of the sages of the

54 M. Idel, "The Writings of R. Abraham Abulafia and His Teaching" (Hebrew), Ph.D. Dissertation, Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1976, pp. 395-433; A. Berger, "The Messianic Self-Consciousness of Abraham Abulafia," J.L. Blau *et al.*, *Essays on Jewish Life and Thought*, New York, 1959, pp. 55-61.

55 On Abulafia's influence on Lemlein, see E. Kupfer, "The Visions of R. Asher b. Meir Lemlein of Reutlingen" (Hebrew), *Kovez al Yad* 8 (18) (1976), p. 397; on Molcho, see Idel, "Abulafia," p. 417; on the mystics of Safed, see R.J.Z. Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo, Lawyer and Mystic*, Philadelphia, 1977, pp. 38-39; Scholem, "Ha-Mekubal R. Abraham Eliezer Ha-Levi" (Hebrew), *Kiryat Sefer* 2 (1925), p. 107, n. 4.

56 The "Jewish" influence of the Marranos on Christian millenary movements also merits further scrutiny, particularly the case of Brother Melchior and the Alumbrados of sixteenth century Spain. See G.H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, pp. 7-8; M. Bataillon, *Erasmus et L'Espagne*, Paris, 1937, pp. 65ff.

57 Scholem, *Sabbatai Zevi*, p. 796.

58 *Ibid.*

59 *Ibid.*, pp. 282-5.

60 *Ibid.*, pp. 583-86.

Gemara, with whom he conversed and from whom he learned? Shall we abandon the truth for fear of the lie? No benefit at all shall emerge for our opponents by conceding that which is certain...<sup>61</sup>

Cardozo has no hesitation in identifying Isaiah's suffering servant with the Messiah and accuses earlier Jewish exegetes of "fleeing from Idumean arguments" by denying this interpretation. As Yosef Yerushalmi argues, one need not impugn Abraham's conscious Jewish loyalties when identifying in his messianic theology the Christian elements which he could not dislodge.<sup>62</sup>

If Christian influence on Marrano eschatologies is discernible in the seventeenth century, what about in earlier periods? As in the case of the Marranos attracted to Sabbatianism, messianic stirrings among their fifteenth and sixteenth century ancestors need not be attributable to Christian inspiration. Yet it seems plausible enough to assume that a Marrano raised for a long period of time in a totally Christian environment could not, in returning to Judaism, totally divorce himself from Christian modes of thinking and behavior. Even when violently uprooting himself from his Christian past, the Marrano might unconsciously assimilate traces of the conceptual background he so willingly repudiates. Such a pattern of behavior is suggested by the heightened anticipation of the Messiah's coming among fifteenth and sixteenth century Marranos. For some time now, students of Jewish messianism in the period preceding and immediately following the Spanish expulsion have known of the considerable evidence available from Inquisitional testimony on messianic stirrings among Marranos both in and outside of Spain.<sup>63</sup> Such evidence for Yizhak Baer was not necessarily the product of a Christian environment since "Conversos and Jews were one people united by bonds of religion, destiny and messianic hope."<sup>64</sup> Yet as the case of Abraham Cardozo suggests, fervent loyalty to the Jewish community is in no way incompatible with Christian influence. How else might one explain the messianic imagery of the Marrano visions described by Baer: visions of the Turk as Anti-Christ or the prophetess of Herrera who sees purgatory and the souls of the dead before penance? It seems to me that a systematic investigation of expressions of messianic anticipation among Marranos, taking into account especially their psychological makeup and the free and imaginative associations of their visions, would yield more hints of the subliminal as well as self-conscious penetration of Christian ideas into their messianic behavior.

<sup>61</sup> Quoted from Yerushalmi, p. 336.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 337-38; cf. Yerushalmi's discussion of Sabbatianism and Sebastianism, pp. 307ff.

<sup>63</sup> See references in note 3 above; Yerushalmi, pp. 303-306, Sharot, *Messianism*, pp. 76-114 and now H. Beinart, "A Prophesying Movement in Cordova in 1499-1502" (Hebrew) in *Yizhak F. Baer Memorial Volume*, *Zion* 44 (1979): 190-200; *idem.*, "The Prophetess Inés and her Movement in Puebla de Alcocer and Talarrubias" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 51 (1951), pp. 631-58; *idem.*, "The Prophetess Inés and Her Movement in her Hometown Herrera" (Hebrew), *Studies in Jewish Mysticism etc. presented to I. Tishby*; Jerusalem, 1986, pp. 459-506. *idem.*, "Conversos of Chillón and Siruela and the Prophecies of Maria Gómez and Inés, the Daughter of Juan Esteban" (Hebrew), *Zion* 48 (1983), pp. 241-72; and the other references to Beinart's work in Tishby, "Genizah Fragments," p. 355, note 206.

<sup>64</sup> Baer, *A History of the Jews*, II, p. 424.



Such hints are dramatically suggested, for example, in the sermons of the most illustrious sixteenth century messianic prophet of Marrano ancestry, Shlomo Molcho. In his collection entitled *Sefer ha-Mefo'ar*, he introduces the same Christian messianic typology of Isaiah 53 in speaking about the Messiah of Israel.<sup>65</sup> This he fuses with an elaborate identification of the characters of the Job allegory cast unmistakably in a contemporary eschatological setting. Thus Job represents Israel, Elihu-Elijah, Eliphaz-Edom or Rome, Bildad-Ishmael or Turkey, the latter two characters to be destroyed along with all of Israel's enemies by the Messiah the Son of Joseph.<sup>66</sup> Molcho had undoubtedly familiarized himself with the themes of Jewish apocalyptic literature like the *Book of Zerubbabel* printed in Constantinople in 1519, and need not have availed himself of parallel Christian messianic typologies current in his generation. Yet alternatively, his graphic depiction of the person of the Messiah, his constant emphasis on the redemption of the poor and downtrodden,<sup>67</sup> and especially his almost histrionic apocalyptic scenes of the utter devastation of Edom reminiscent of visions of the coming of the Anti-Christ,<sup>68</sup> might all betray his Christian upbringing. These allusions, taken together with his complex personality traits, his aspiration to die as a martyr, and the unusual receptivity his prophecies were accorded in the Christian world, recommend him as a prime candidate for the transference of Christian eschatological ideas into Judaism.<sup>69</sup> The potential Christian source of Molcho's messianic disposition is all the more interesting given the profound impact he had on such sixteenth century Rabbinic luminaries as Joseph Taitazak and Joseph Karo.<sup>70</sup>

### *Lurianic Messianism and Its Sixteenth Century Christian Counterparts*

In light of the evidence we have considered so far, it seems safe to acknowledge a certain degree of mutual interaction between Jewish and Christian messianic beliefs and activity in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Such an acknowledgment need not exaggerate the importance of such mutuality nor blur the obvious dissimilarities between the two faiths, but it does suggest the extent to which late medieval messianic expectations constitute a clearly visible reflection of shared mental attitudes and behavior among Jews and Christians.

Yet such a guarded conclusion still appears somewhat imbalanced and certainly incomplete without calling attention, albeit briefly, to at least one major area of Jewish messianism which clearly does not intersect with Christian millennial forms,

65 S. Molcho, *Sefer Ha-Mefo'ar*, Amsterdam, 1709, pp. 15a-15b. This has already been noticed by Scholem, *Sabbatai Zevi*, pp. 54, 309, n. 292.

66 *Ibid.*, pp. 16b-17a.

67 See for example, pp. 15b, 20b, 21a.

68 See for example his sermon on "The Great Sabbath," pp. 22aff.

69 One of the primary sources for Molcho's biography is his book of visions entitled *Hayyat Kaneh*, Amsterdam, 1658?. Another fascinating example of the transference of Christian eschatology in Judaism is found in the *Sefer ha-Meshiv*. See the illuminating article of M. Idel, "The Attitude to Christianity in the *Sefer ha-Meshiv*", (Hebrew), *Zion* 46 (1981), pp. 77-91, especially 88-91. Idel even suggests the possibility of the author's converso ancestry (see p. 78 there).

70 Cf. Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, pp. 97ff.; Scholem, "The Maggid," p. 70.

revealing independence and originality rather than confluence or commonality. What I am proposing is that an overall comparison of Jewish and Christian messianism in this period might also adumbrate, from a perspective previously unnoticed, the marked features of Jewish messianism which define the uniqueness and novelty of its conception in the sixteenth century.

I am referring especially to the ideology of Lurianic kabbalah, generally viewed as the most dramatic and influential expression of Jewish messianic anticipation of this period.<sup>71</sup> When reflecting initially on the messianic myth of creation and redemption of Isaac Luria, I was especially intrigued by the possibility of structural similarity, if not influence, between Luria's conception of *Tikkun* and the Catholic ideal of reform as articulated by certain sixteenth century exponents of Church renewal.<sup>72</sup> Such outrageously dissimilar notions would appear to have little in common with each other. Yet a favorable comparison of the meaning of both ideals and their social setting need not be dismissed out of hand. Besides the obvious linguistic similarity between *Tikkun* and *Reformatio* or *Renovatio*, other similarities come to mind. *Tikkun*, or the process of restoring or mending an ideal order through the spiritual and mystical activity of man, is nothing less than a bold and dramatic vision of mission and reform—the mystic is charged with the task of reuniting the scattered fragments of creation and healing the sickness of the cosmos by first purifying his own soul through acts of piety and spiritual meditation.<sup>73</sup>

How different is this ideal from that of the Pauline doctrine of reform expounded by sixteenth century Catholic reformers? For Ignatius Loyola and his disciples in the Society for Jesus, personal salvation depended upon a spiritual regeneration brought out by human effort, beginning with the purging and cleansing of each individual Christian soul. The typical Catholic reformer, as dramatically portrayed in Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, was a mystic guide engaged in spiritual battle with evil attempting to transform himself and his spiritual devotees before transforming the world.<sup>74</sup> What was critical for the Catholic reformers, like the Safed mystics yet

71 For a useful summary, see Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 244-86 or Scholem, *Sabbatai Zevi*, chapter 1, as well as I. Tishby, *Torat ha-Ra ve-ha-kelipah be-kabbalat ha-Ari*, Jerusalem, 1966.

72 On Lurianic *Tikkun*, see Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 268ff.; Scholem, *Sabbatai Zevi*, pp. 40ff. On the general concept of reform in early Christianity, see G.B. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers*, Cambridge, Mass., 1959; N.Y. 1967. For the sixteenth century, see O'Malley, *Giles of Viterbo*, pp. 1ff; H.O. Evennett, *The Spirit of the Counter-Reformation*, Cambridge, 1968; H. Daniel-Rops, *The Catholic Reformation*, London, 1962; R.E. McNalley, "The Council of Trent, *The Spiritual Exercises* and the Catholic Reform," *Church History* 34 (1965): 36-49; J.C. Olin, *The Catholic Reformation: Savonarola to Ignatius Loyola*, New York, 1969; idem, "Erasmus and Reform" in *Desiderius Erasmus, Christian Humanism and the Reformation*, New York, 1965, pp. 1-21; Marocchi, *La riforma cattolica, documenti e testimonianze*, Brescia, 1967, 2 vols.; P. Janell, *The Catholic Reformation*, Milwaukee, 1963, pp. 183ff. On the general background of Church renewal, see the more recent works of J. Delumeau, *Catholicism between Luther and Voltaire*, London-Philadelphia, 1977; A.D. Wright, *The Counter-Reformation: Catholic Europe and the Non-Christian World*, London, 1982, with extensive bibliography.

73 Besides the two works of Scholem, see Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, chapter 4; Tishby, pp. 113ff.

74 *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, translated by A. Mottola, introduction by R.W. Gleason, Garden City, N.Y., 1964.

unlike the quietistic fatalism of either Luther or Calvin, was the importance of human free will and human effort in effecting reform.<sup>75</sup> To Loyola is attributed the saying: "We must work as if success depended on ourselves and not God."<sup>76</sup> The mystical reformer directs all of his spiritual energies to eradicating sin, to ascetic denial, to mental concentration on biblical and religious subjects, intense prayer and meditation, in order to raise each individual soul to the bliss of eternal life.

If one could remove for a moment the specific content feeding the spiritual lives of both kinds of mystics, how different would Lurianic and Loyolan piety actually be? A zealous drive for spiritual rejuvenation, eradication of evil, repentance and love of God grounded in the communal life of devout brotherhoods and elevated by a sense of divine mission and spiritual elitism marked the religious vision of both.<sup>77</sup>

Yet the comparison is misleading in one major respect.<sup>78</sup> The ideal of human reform and spiritual perfection articulated by Loyola and his disciples is never embedded in an eschatological context. Christian reform may lead to spiritual salvation, but it is forcefully detached from any apocalyptic vision of the end of days. On the contrary, the Loyolan ideal of human perfectibility would have little in common with the visions of sixteenth century Christian apocalyptics. More often than not, the latter had little desire to refashion human personality or society. Their vision of dramatic upheaval rested on social withdrawal rather than engagement; change would be effected by divine intervention rather than human effort. The only human roles were to gather together, to await signs of the coming doom, to listen to the prophets, to purify oneself and to pray. And more often than not, prognosticators of the Last Judgment and the Golden Age would find the social activity of the army of mystical reformers unworthy of serious attention.<sup>79</sup> Even within a figure like Giles of Viterbo, where the two tendencies of human reform and

75 On the importance of human effort in Catholic reform, see especially Janelle, p. 153; Evennet, pp. 36ff.; Daniel-Rops, p. 35. For the Lurianic kabbalists, see the works of Scholem, Tishby, and Werblowsky as well as B. Sack, "The Mystical Theology of Solomon Alkabez" (Hebrew), Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1978, pp. 171ff.

76 Quoted by Daniel-Rops, p. 35.

77 The parallel between the Catholic and Lurianic spiritual brotherhoods is especially interesting. On the latter, see Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, pp. 58ff and D. Tamar, "On the Associations of Safed" (Hebrew) in *Mehkarim be-toledot Ha-Yehudim be-Erez Yisra'el u-ve-Italia*, Jerusalem, 1970, pp. 95-100.

78 It is also misleading because some of the Lurian mystics, such as Hayyim Vital, engaged in techniques of spiritual preparation not only to make themselves worthy of God, as Loyola, but for magical purposes as well. On this, see Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, p. 48.

79 On the diverging paths of Christian reform and apocalyptic withdrawal, see the suggestive comments of G. Tellenbach, *Church, State and Christian Society at the Time of the Investiture Contest*, trans. by R.F. Bennett Oxford, 1966, pp. 25ff.; B. McGinn, *Visions of the End*, p. 32; E.J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Manchester, 1959, pp. 58-9; cf. also, Werblowsky's distinctions between eschatological and reformative, active and passive messianism in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 11, 1021; E.L. Tuveson, *Millennium and Utopia, A Study in the Background of the Idea of Progress*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1949, pp. 17-30. However, note the evidence Reeves brings for Jesuit reformers who were influenced by Joachimist ideas (Reeves, *The Influence of Prophecy*, pp. 274-6, 278-80, 287-8, 382). Postel himself viewed the Jesuits as the principal agency of reform and part of an eschatological divine pattern but the Jesuits later expelled him.

millennial expectation seem to coalesce, the chasm between passive apocalypticism and active reform is remarkably preserved. Giles' reform measures have nothing to do with his eschatology. History for Giles was to be consummated by divine energies, not human ones.<sup>80</sup>

How alien this dichotomy seems to the Lurianic formulation. The spiritual reform of the pious mystic constitutes the primary instrument of rescuing the divine *Shekhina* from imprisonment in the realm of the *kelipah*. Man alone and not God holds the keys to earthly salvation. Man alone is empowered to bring about the Messiah. The redemption of Israel is not the result of a sudden and dramatic divine intervention outside the realm of history; it is rather a logical and necessary fruition of human endeavor achieved within the historical realm.<sup>81</sup>

The only sixteenth century Christians who would allow the coadunation of human activity and messianic anticipation were not reformers but dissenters. For the radical reformers, reform was too gradual and lengthy a process; radical rupture with the immediate past, repudiation of existing authority, whether ecclesiastic or secular, and the implementation of a new social order informed their eschatological visions. They lived with the gripping conviction that the restoration for which they yearned could only be gained by the eradication of social and spiritual ills, not by their progressive amelioration. Coloring their messianic activism were the charges and countercharges of heresy versus orthodoxy, legitimate dissent versus the discipline of Church authority.<sup>82</sup>

And uniquely between these two extremes of Church reform purged of messianic anticipation, on the one hand, and Church revolt fused with intense expectancy of disaster and rebirth on the other, lies the original conception of Lurianic messianism—neither mystic dissent nor withdrawal but a gradualistic human reform firmly grounded in a cosmic myth of renewal and restoration. When viewed against the background of Catholic reform and Protestant rebellion, the uniqueness of the Lurianic conception is thus brought sharply into focus. It forcefully reminds us that the recognition of apparent similarities and even mutually shared perceptions ought not obscure the unmistakable dissimilarities underlying Christian and Jewish visions of the messianic future at the end of the Middle Ages.

80 O'Malley, *Giles of Viterbo*, p. 148.

81 This is fully described in the works of Scholem and Tishby cited in note 71 above.

82 See especially, Williams, *The Radical Reformation*, pp. 857-65. Cf. Strauss, *Manifestations of Discontent* and L.H. Zuck, *Christianity and Revolution, Radical Christian Testimonies 1520-1650*, Philadelphia, 1975; N. Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages*, expanded and revised London, 1970; S. Ozment, *Mysticism and Dissent, Religious Ideology and Social Protest in the 16th Century*, New Haven and London, 1973.

# EXILE AND DIASPORA

*Studies in the History of the Jewish People  
Presented to Professor Haim Beinart*



BEN-ZVI INSTITUTE  
OF YAD IZHAK BEN-ZVI  
AND THE HEBREW UNIVERSITY  
OF JERUSALEM



CONSEJO SUPERIOR  
DE INVESTIGACIONES  
CIENTÍFICAS  
MADRID

JERUSALEM 1991

Editors: Aharon Mirsky, Avraham Grossman, Yosef Kaplan

DS  
135  
S7  
E95  
1991

Published with the support of the Center for Integration of the Cultural Heritage of Oriental  
Jewry in the Israel Ministry of Education and Culture

©

All Rights Reserved to the Ben-Zvi Institute for the Study of Jewish Communities in the East,  
Jerusalem 1991

Printed in Jerusalem, Israel  
ISBN 965-235-037-0

